

DEVELOPING STUDENTS' SCIENTIFIC THINKING THROUGH A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH IN CHEMISTRY EDUCATION

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Abstract

This article examines the theoretical and practical foundations of developing students' scientific thinking through a methodological approach in chemistry education. Within the framework of the competency-based paradigm of modern education, fostering students' scientific worldview, logical and critical thinking, as well as their ability to identify scientific problems and justify solutions, has become one of the most important pedagogical objectives. The study explores the essence of the methodological approach, its didactic potential in chemistry teaching, and the mechanisms for developing scientific thinking among learners. Particular attention is given to the use of problem-based learning, inquiry-based instruction, experimental activities, and reflective analysis as effective tools for enhancing students' scientific reasoning. The findings indicate that chemistry instruction organized on the basis of a methodological approach positively influences the development of students' analytical thinking, interest in scientific inquiry, experimental skills, and practical competencies.

Keywords

chemistry education, methodological approach, scientific thinking, scientific worldview, research competence, problem-based learning, experimental activity, reflective analysis, competency-based education.

Introduction. The ongoing modernization of educational systems worldwide has highlighted the necessity of moving beyond the simple transmission of ready-made knowledge toward the development of students' scientific thinking, research abilities, and competencies required for solving problems on a scientific basis. Particularly in science education, the formation of scientific thinking is increasingly recognized as one of the key indicators of educational quality. In the context of the twenty-first century, characterized by complex social, economic, and technological

challenges, modern education is expected to prepare individuals who are capable of making evidence-based decisions, working effectively with data, and applying critical thinking skills in various contexts.

Chemistry, as both a theoretical and experimental science, provides unique pedagogical opportunities for developing students' scientific thinking. The processes of observing chemical phenomena, planning and conducting experiments, analyzing results, and drawing scientifically grounded conclusions stimulate learners' cognitive activity and encourage the acquisition of higher-order thinking skills. Therefore, chemistry education should be viewed not only as a means of transmitting subject-specific knowledge but also as a powerful tool for cultivating a culture of scientific reasoning and inquiry. In recent years, increasing attention has been devoted to the concept of the methodological approach in educational theory and practice. Beyond facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, this approach enables students to understand the mechanisms through which knowledge is generated, apply scientific methods of inquiry, and comprehend the logical structure of scientific activity. Consequently, learners are transformed from passive recipients of information into active participants who seek, construct, and generate new knowledge. Educational reforms implemented in the Republic of Uzbekistan have also emphasized the introduction of competency-based approaches aimed at developing students' scientific thinking. In particular, the enhancement of research competencies, the strengthening of experimental activities, and the widespread implementation of innovative pedagogical technologies have been identified as strategic priorities in science education. These developments underscore the importance of thoroughly investigating the theoretical foundations and practical mechanisms of the methodological approach in chemistry education.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the theoretical and methodological foundations of developing students' scientific thinking through a methodological approach in chemistry education, to reveal its pedagogical potential, and to substantiate effective methodological solutions for its implementation in the teaching and learning process.

Literature Review. The issue of developing scientific thinking has long been recognized as one of the major research directions in pedagogy, psychology, and science education. The theoretical foundations of this concept can be traced to the works of prominent scholars such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner. Their studies conceptualized scientific cognition as a product of learners' active intellectual engagement rather than passive reception of information. In particular, Dewey's theory of reflective thinking and Bruner's

discovery learning approach have provided a substantial theoretical basis for contemporary methodologies aimed at fostering scientific thinking. In modern educational research, scientific thinking is generally defined as a complex set of cognitive abilities that enable learners to observe phenomena, identify problems, formulate hypotheses, design experiments, analyze data, and draw evidence-based conclusions. From this perspective, scientific thinking involves not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the mastery of scientific methods and ways of inquiry. Consequently, educational practices that emphasize the processes of knowledge construction are considered more effective in developing scientific reasoning than those focused solely on content transmission.

Within the field of chemistry education, the methodological approach is interpreted as a pedagogical framework that enables students to understand not merely the content of chemical knowledge but also the mechanisms through which such knowledge is generated and validated. Studies conducted by R. W. Bybee, D. Hodson, A. Hofstein, and other researchers have demonstrated the effectiveness of inquiry-based learning, experimental activities, and problem-solving approaches in promoting scientific thinking. Their findings indicate that students who actively engage in scientific investigations develop a deeper understanding of scientific concepts and demonstrate higher levels of analytical and critical thinking. In international educational research, the development of scientific thinking is closely associated with the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education movement. The STEM framework emphasizes not only the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge but also the development of research, engineering, and innovative thinking competencies. Numerous studies have shown that students who participate in inquiry-oriented and research-enriched learning environments exhibit superior analytical skills, problem-solving abilities, and academic performance compared to those engaged in traditional instructional settings.

Research conducted by scholars in Uzbekistan has also highlighted the importance of developing scientific thinking within science education. Particular attention has been devoted to competency-based approaches, the enhancement of students' research competencies, the implementation of problem-based learning strategies, and the improvement of experimental activities. These studies have provided valuable insights into the pedagogical conditions necessary for fostering scientific thinking among learners. Nevertheless, an analysis of the existing literature reveals that there remains a need for a more comprehensive examination of the methodological approach in chemistry education, particularly regarding its role in developing scientific thinking, its structural components, and its pedagogical mechanisms. Although individual aspects of scientific thinking and

inquiry-based instruction have been extensively studied, the integration of these elements into a coherent methodological framework requires further investigation. Recent advances in digital technologies, virtual laboratories, and artificial intelligence-based educational tools have opened new opportunities for the development of scientific thinking. These technologies enable students to model complex chemical processes, conduct experiments in safe and controlled environments, and engage in various stages of scientific inquiry through virtual platforms. As a result, the methodological approach has expanded beyond traditional classroom practices and gained additional pedagogical potential through technological integration.

The findings of the literature review suggest that the development of scientific thinking is intrinsically linked to the activation of cognitive processes, the organization of research-oriented activities, and the formation of methodological knowledge. Therefore, a comprehensive investigation of the theoretical and practical dimensions of the methodological approach in chemistry education remains a significant and relevant area of contemporary pedagogical research.

Research Methodology. This study was designed to investigate the theoretical and practical aspects of developing students' scientific thinking through a methodological approach in chemistry education. The research was grounded in systemic, competency-based, activity-oriented, and methodological approaches to scientific cognition and learning. These approaches served as the conceptual framework for examining the pedagogical conditions and mechanisms that contribute to the formation of scientific thinking among students.

The theoretical and methodological foundation of the study was based on constructivist learning theory, activity theory, competency-based education, and contemporary perspectives on scientific inquiry. These theoretical frameworks emphasize the active role of learners in constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving information. Accordingly, students are viewed as active participants in the learning process who generate, evaluate, and apply knowledge through purposeful intellectual activity.

To achieve the objectives of the study, several research methods were employed:

- analysis and review of scientific and pedagogical literature;
- comparative pedagogical analysis;
- systematization and generalization of theoretical findings;
- content analysis of relevant educational sources;
- pedagogical modeling;
- analysis of pedagogical observation results.

During the research process, several structural components of the methodological approach were identified and analyzed.

Cognitive Component encompasses students' knowledge of chemical concepts, laws, theories, and scientific methods of inquiry. Within the methodological approach, students are expected not only to understand chemical facts and principles but also to comprehend the processes through which scientific knowledge is generated, validated, and applied. Such understanding contributes to the formation of a deeper scientific worldview and enhances conceptual learning.

Operational-Activity Component includes the practical skills necessary for scientific inquiry. These skills involve identifying scientific problems, formulating hypotheses, designing and conducting experiments, processing and interpreting data, and drawing scientifically justified conclusions. This component reflects the practical dimension of scientific thinking and provides students with opportunities to engage directly in research-oriented activities.

Reflective Component focuses on students' ability to evaluate and analyze their own cognitive activities. It involves identifying mistakes, assessing the effectiveness of selected strategies, self-evaluation, and planning future learning actions. Reflection plays a crucial role in the development of scientific thinking because it enables learners to critically examine their reasoning processes and continuously improve their intellectual performance.

According to the conceptual framework of the study, the development of scientific thinking occurs through a sequence of methodological stages:

- creating a problem situation;
- identifying a scientific problem;
- formulating a hypothesis;
- organizing experimental activities;
- analyzing results;
- drawing scientific conclusions;
- reflection and evaluation.

The systematic implementation of these stages facilitates the organization of students' scientific inquiry activities and supports the gradual development of higher-order thinking skills. The experimental nature of chemistry education creates particularly favorable conditions for applying this methodological sequence. Through laboratory activities, students establish connections between theoretical concepts and practical experience, identify cause-and-effect relationships, and internalize the mechanisms of scientific reasoning.

An important aspect of the research methodology was the development of criteria for assessing the level of scientific thinking among students. The proposed criteria included:

- the ability to identify scientific problems;
- the level of hypothesis-generation skills;
- competence in planning experiments;
- the quality of data analysis and interpretation;
- the ability to formulate scientifically grounded conclusions;
- the level of reflective activity.

These criteria were used to evaluate the influence of the methodological approach on educational effectiveness and to determine its pedagogical potential for fostering scientific thinking in chemistry education. The assessment framework also provided a basis for identifying the specific cognitive and practical outcomes associated with the implementation of methodological approaches in the teaching and learning process.

Overall, the methodological framework adopted in this study enabled a comprehensive examination of the processes involved in developing students' scientific thinking and provided a structured basis for analyzing the pedagogical effectiveness of methodological approaches in chemistry education.

Analysis and Results. The findings of the study indicate that the educational process organized on the basis of a methodological approach in chemistry education provides significant pedagogical opportunities for the development of students' scientific thinking. The analysis revealed that traditional reproductive teaching methods primarily focus on the transmission and memorization of ready-made knowledge, whereas a methodological approach transforms students into active participants in the process of scientific inquiry. Consequently, learners become engaged in discovering, analyzing, and constructing knowledge rather than merely reproducing information.

The development of scientific thinking is achieved through the systematic organization of students' cognitive activities, beginning with the identification of a problem situation and culminating in the formulation of scientifically grounded conclusions. Due to the experimental nature of chemistry, the subject provides particularly favorable conditions for implementing such an approach. For example, when studying the topic "Factors Affecting the Rate of Chemical Reactions," students are not provided with ready-made explanations. Instead, they are encouraged to observe reaction behavior under different conditions, compare results, identify patterns, and formulate conclusions independently. This process requires students to perform scientific operations such as observation, comparison,

analysis, interpretation, and generalization. Based on the analysis, a methodological model for the development of scientific thinking was proposed. The model consists of four interrelated components that collectively support the formation of scientific reasoning and inquiry skills.

Motivational and Goal-Oriented Component. This component aims to stimulate students' interest in scientific inquiry, encourage curiosity about chemical phenomena, and foster motivation for research-oriented activities. The results indicate that lessons organized around problem situations significantly increase students' intrinsic motivation compared to traditional teacher-centered instruction. Students become more willing to investigate, ask questions, and seek explanations when they encounter intellectually challenging situations.

Content and Competency-Based Component. This component encompasses chemical knowledge, scientific concepts, principles, laws, and methods of scientific inquiry. Within this framework, emphasis is placed not on the quantity of acquired knowledge but on its meaningful application. Students are expected not only to understand chemical theories but also to apply them in new and unfamiliar situations. Such an approach contributes to the development of transferable competencies and deeper conceptual understanding.

Operational-Activity Component. The operational-activity component reflects the practical dimension of scientific thinking. Students engage in activities such as observation, experimentation, hypothesis generation, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The study found that this component plays a decisive role in the formation of scientific thinking because it directly involves learners in the processes characteristic of scientific research.

Reflective and Evaluation Component. This component focuses on students' ability to evaluate their own learning processes, identify the causes of errors, and develop strategies for self-improvement. Reflection is considered an essential element of scientific thinking because it promotes critical examination of evidence, reasoning processes, and conclusions. Through reflective activities, students develop metacognitive awareness and improve their ability to regulate their own learning.

The research identified several pedagogical opportunities associated with the implementation of a methodological approach in chemistry education. These include:

- the formation of a scientific worldview;
- the development of critical and analytical thinking;
- the enhancement of scientific problem-solving skills;
- the development of research competencies;

the improvement of experimental performance;
the establishment of interdisciplinary connections;
the promotion of creative and innovative thinking.

The findings also demonstrated that problem-based learning plays a particularly important role in implementing the methodological approach. A problem situation creates a contradiction between students' existing knowledge and a new challenge that requires explanation. In attempting to resolve this contradiction, learners actively seek new information, test assumptions, and construct knowledge independently. Such processes contribute naturally to the development of scientific thinking.

For instance, when studying the topic "The Activity Series of Metals," students may be presented with the following question: Why is iron capable of displacing copper from a copper sulfate solution, whereas copper cannot displace iron from an iron sulfate solution? This problem situation encourages students to formulate hypotheses, conduct observations and experiments, analyze results, and derive scientific explanations based on evidence.

As a result of the analysis, a three-level model describing the development of scientific thinking was established.

Reproductive Level. At this level, students mainly receive and reproduce ready-made knowledge. Their ability to identify scientific problems independently and develop solutions remains insufficiently developed. Learning activities are largely guided by the teacher, and students demonstrate limited autonomy in scientific inquiry.

Partially Exploratory Level. At this stage, students participate in scientific inquiry under the guidance of the teacher. They are capable of analyzing problems, proposing preliminary hypotheses, and conducting certain experimental procedures with partial independence. Scientific reasoning begins to emerge, although significant instructional support is still required.

Research-Oriented Level. This represents the highest stage of scientific thinking development. Students independently identify scientific problems, formulate hypotheses, design experiments, analyze evidence, and draw scientifically justified conclusions. At this level, learners demonstrate the characteristics of independent researchers and exhibit advanced analytical and critical thinking abilities.

The findings revealed that students participating in chemistry instruction organized according to the methodological approach tended to progress from the reproductive level toward partially exploratory and research-oriented levels of scientific thinking. This progression confirms the positive impact of the

methodological approach on the development of higher-order cognitive abilities. Furthermore, the integration of methodological approaches with digital technologies was found to produce particularly effective results. Virtual laboratories, interactive models, and digital simulations enable students to visualize complex chemical processes and repeatedly perform experimental procedures in safe learning environments. As a result, students gain a deeper understanding of scientific concepts and the logical sequence of scientific inquiry.

Based on the research findings, a conceptual model for implementing the methodological approach in chemistry education was proposed. The model follows the sequence:

Problem Situation → Question Formulation → Hypothesis Development → Experimentation → Analysis → Conclusion → Reflection → New Scientific Problem.

This sequence reflects the natural cycle of scientific inquiry and promotes the continuous development of scientific thinking. The cyclical nature of the model ensures that each completed investigation becomes the starting point for new questions and further exploration, thereby fostering a sustainable culture of scientific reasoning among learners.

Overall, the results of the study demonstrate that the methodological approach serves as an effective means of developing students' scientific thinking, research skills, analytical abilities, and key competencies in chemistry education. More importantly, it facilitates the transformation of learners from passive recipients of information into active researchers and creative problem-solvers capable of engaging in meaningful scientific inquiry.

Discussion. The findings of this study demonstrate that the methodological approach plays a significant role in fostering students' scientific thinking in chemistry education. The obtained results are consistent with both international and national research findings in the fields of science education and educational methodology. In particular, the inquiry-based learning framework proposed by Bybee within STEM education and Hodson's perspective on laboratory activities as a means of developing scientific reasoning provide strong theoretical support for the conclusions of this study. The analysis indicates that the methodological approach contributes not only to the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge but also to the development of students' understanding of scientific inquiry processes. As a result, learners move beyond simple memorization of chemical laws and concepts toward a deeper comprehension of their underlying principles, causal relationships, and practical applications. This shift is particularly important in contemporary education, where the ability to apply knowledge in novel situations

is regarded as a key indicator of educational quality. Furthermore, the study revealed that methodological approaches facilitate the activation of students' cognitive processes and encourage independent learning. Through engagement in problem-solving, experimentation, and reflective activities, learners become active participants in the construction of knowledge. Such engagement promotes intellectual autonomy and strengthens students' capacity for critical evaluation of information and evidence.

Another important finding concerns the relationship between methodological approaches and competency-based education. The results suggest that the methodological approach effectively supports the development of competencies required for the twenty-first century, including critical thinking, problem-solving, research skills, communication, and creativity. These competencies are increasingly recognized as essential for successful participation in both academic and professional contexts. The integration of digital technologies into methodological approaches further enhances their educational effectiveness. Virtual laboratories, interactive simulations, and technology-enhanced learning environments create opportunities for students to engage with scientific concepts in dynamic and meaningful ways. These tools not only increase accessibility to experimental experiences but also support individualized learning and deeper conceptual understanding. Despite the positive outcomes identified in this study, several challenges remain in the implementation of methodological approaches in chemistry education. These challenges include insufficient methodological training of teachers, limited laboratory resources, inadequate instructional materials, and varying levels of digital literacy among educators and students. Addressing these issues is essential for maximizing the educational potential of methodological approaches and ensuring their successful integration into classroom practice.

Overall, the findings confirm that chemistry education organized on the basis of a methodological approach provides effective conditions for the development of students' scientific worldview, research culture, and innovative thinking. The approach creates a learning environment in which students actively engage in scientific inquiry and develop the intellectual competencies necessary for lifelong learning and professional success.

Conclusion and Recommendations. The results of the study indicate that the methodological approach constitutes an important pedagogical factor in the development of students' scientific thinking in chemistry education. This approach stimulates learners' cognitive activity, encourages independent thinking, and promotes engagement in scientific inquiry and evidence-based problem-solving. The findings demonstrate that the effective development of scientific thinking

depends on the systematic organization of methodological stages, including observation, problem identification, hypothesis formulation, experimentation, data analysis, and the drawing of scientifically justified conclusions. The study further revealed that problem-based learning, inquiry-based instruction, and experimental activities represent some of the most effective tools for implementing a methodological approach. These instructional strategies significantly contribute to the development of students' analytical and critical thinking abilities while enhancing their capacity for scientific reasoning. The findings also show that the use of virtual laboratories, digital simulations, and interactive educational technologies substantially expands the practical possibilities of methodological approaches and increases their effectiveness in promoting scientific thinking. Such technologies provide opportunities for visualizing complex chemical phenomena, conducting experiments in safe environments, and supporting students' active participation in the learning process.

As a result, chemistry education organized according to methodological principles contributes to the development of students' research competencies, scientific worldview, and innovative thinking abilities. The approach enables learners to become active participants in scientific inquiry rather than passive recipients of information.

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations can be proposed:

to expand the inclusion of methodological knowledge and scientific inquiry methods within chemistry curricula;

to enrich laboratory activities with research-oriented tasks and problem-solving exercises;

to organize professional development programs aimed at enhancing teachers' methodological competence;

to promote the wider implementation of virtual laboratories and digital simulations in chemistry education;

to develop integrative instructional tasks based on the principles of scientific research and inquiry.

In conclusion, the development of students' scientific thinking through a methodological approach in chemistry education represents one of the priority directions of contemporary educational practice. It serves as an essential pedagogical condition for preparing scientifically literate, creative, critically minded, competitive, and innovation-oriented individuals capable of meeting the challenges of modern society and contributing to future scientific and technological advancement.

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